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Baseball Research Center Acquires More Than 300 Microfilms from National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

SAN DIEGO – The San Diego SABR Baseball Research Center, located in the Central Library, has acquired more than 300 microfilms of archival resources from the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library in Cooperstown, N.Y. The Hall of Fame Library has been helping the Baseball Research Center to develop its collections over the last year.

The Baseball Research Center began in 2000 as a partnership between the City of San Diego Public Library and the San Diego Ted Williams chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), which has been active locally since 1984.

“This is ‘home run’ for baseball research and our San Diego SABR Baseball Research Center!” said Tom Larwin, president of the Ted Williams chapter of SABR. “We now have access to unique player records dating back to the 19th century, including players from the major leagues, minor leagues, Negro leagues, and All American Girls Professional Baseball League.” Larwin noted that SABR and the Library have plans for continued expansion of resources at the Center.

“We are very pleased to continue our partnership with SABR and increase the baseball-related collection at the San Diego Public Library,” said City Library Director Anna Tatár. “Our thanks go to the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library for making this opportunity available to us.”

A formal announcement of the acquisition will be made Sunday, March 19 when Dale Petroskey, president of National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, will address a special regional meeting of the San Diego Ted Williams SABR chapter. The meeting will be held at 11 a.m., at the La Granada Room of the House of Hospitality in Balboa Park. Admission is free and the public is invited.

“SABR plays a central role in unearthing research, scholarly writing and helping all fans to understand baseball and its role in American history,” said Hall of Fame President Dale Petroskey. “I’m honored to have been asked to speak at the San Diego chapter, especially since it bears the name of one of our Game’s greatest legends, Ted Williams. The Hall of Fame is also very pleased to be working in a cooperative effort with the San Diego Public Library to help develop a serious baseball research center which will be available to all fans of our great National Pastime.”

The largest part of the new acquisition is the Minor League Contract Card Collection, which contains 271 reels. These are records of the contractual transactions between all minor league players and their clubs, from approximately 1900 to 1980. The cards were used to track player movement and as a record of contract status.

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The collection also includes day-by-day records for players during the 1880s and 1890s. Day-by-day records track individual player performance on a daily basis and are considered the official record of Major League Baseball. Thousands of questionnaires completed by players from the 1940s to the 1980s, including those with the Negro leagues and the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, are also in the collection.

The microfilm collection is not yet ready for public use. An announcement will be made later this year when the microfilm collections have been processed and are accessible to the public.

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Details About the Microfilm Archival Resources

The **minor league contract cards** are records of the contractual transactions between all minor league players and their clubs, from approximately 1900 to 1980. The index cards were kept at the National Association offices and used to track player movement, and as a record of contract status, for when disputes among clubs over players came up. It is estimated that the records are about 98 percent complete, but occasionally a known minor league does not show up in the set, probably because his card was removed at one point by someone at the National Association office. The Hall of Fame Library staff highly recommended this set for purchase, because every day people ask them to research someone in their family or from their hometown who played professional ball. These cards are heavily used at the Hall of Fame Library.

Day-by-day records or official averages were kept by National League and American League offices, tracking individual player performance on a daily basis. They are useful for researching streaks and also discovering errors in the historical record. For example, these were used in the discovery of Hack Wilson's 191st RBI for 1930. These are considered the official record of Major League Baseball, so if these disagree with published sources, this source wins. This initial acquisition includes the 19th century records. (22 reels)

MLB Questionnaires: Something of a misnomer, most of these questionnaires were in fact administered by the Hall of Fame staff from the 1940s to the 1980s, although some are official league questionnaires. They are a great reference for demographic and biographical information, as well as a fairly reliable signature reference. This includes Negro leagues and All American Girls Professional Baseball League material (one reel each). The Hall of Fame Library staff recommended these materials most highly because they add a multicultural aspect to the research center that is highly sought by students and also would be useful in promoting the collection. (18 reels)

Tom Burlin Questionnaires: Burlin was a hobbyist researcher who mailed thousands of questionnaires to players over the years. His questions were quite revealing and the documents also serve as a good signature reference. (18 reels)

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